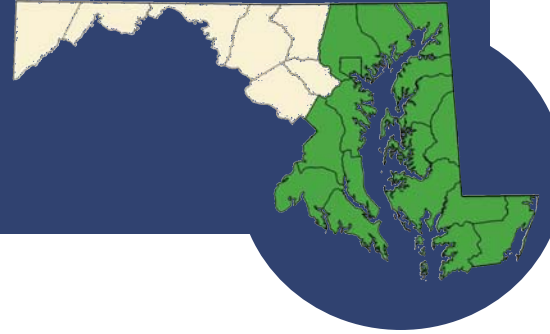


Atlantic Coastal Bays

Maryland Coastal Program



The Issue...

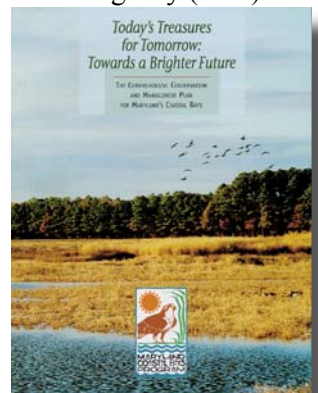
In the past decade, there has been growing concern regarding the current and future state of Maryland's coastal bays. The economy of the region is heavily dependent on its natural resources, which are facing mounting pressures. The year-round population in the region is expected to double by 2020. Each year over 12 million people visit the coastal bays supporting the area's \$2 billion dollar tourism industry. Worcester County's farms, along with its forest resources, contribute more than \$200 million annually to the local economy and provide both open space and habitat for wildlife. The Maryland Coastal Program (MCP) has provided an avenue for partnership, public education and outreach, and obtaining science-based ecosystem information to ensure a sustainable future for the coastal bays region.

The State's Involvement...

In 1996, the Maryland Coastal Bays Program was officially established as an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) National Estuary Program to assist the region in developing a comprehensive management plan to restore and protect Maryland's Coastal Bays. The State played a key role in establishing the new Coastal Bays Program, and is now a major partner in the Program. In 1999, the work of state and local government agencies, citizens, nonprofits, and local industry representatives completed the "Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan for Maryland's Coastal Bays." The plan identifies broad goals, specific action plans, and responsible agencies for the next 15 years.

Partnerships have been formed between local governments, state agencies, federal agencies, and other stakeholders to comprehensively address issues in the coastal bays. Some significant accomplishments of these partnerships include:

- Improved land use planning for the region by the establishment of the Worcester County Comprehensive Planning Department.
- Established a comprehensive water quality monitoring program.
- Increased protection of shoreline buffers by passing the "Atlantic Coastal Bays Protection Act."
- Reduced boater pollution in the Northern Coastal Bays by establishing a federal No-Discharge Zone.
- Developed forestry programs for mitigation and afforestation.



The Coastal Program's Role...

The Coastal Program was a catalyst in establishing the coastal bays as an EPA National Estuary. While the Coastal Bays Program was being developed, the Coastal Program supported and housed Coastal Bays Program staff and facilitated the development of the Management Plan. The Coastal Program continues to play a significant role in the direction and implementation of the Coastal Bays Program. The Coastal Program has been working to:

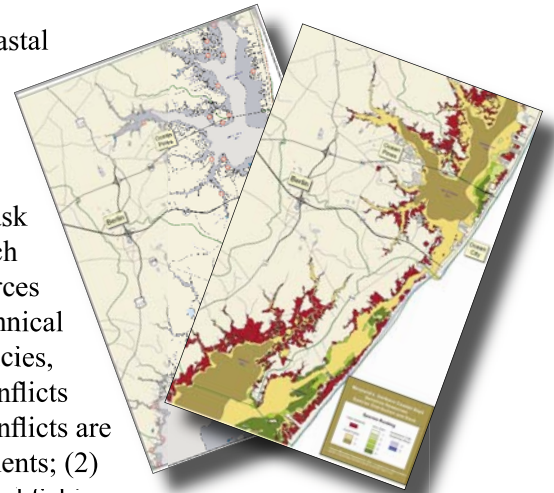
- Increase aquatic habitat protection by developing an Aquatic Sensitive Areas Management Plan.
- Improve navigation and dredging in the coastal bays by leading an advisory group to study navigation and dredging issues in the coastal bays.
- Increase habitat protection and restoration by working with stakeholders to develop watershed plans.
- Assess the economic value of natural resources in the coastal bays watershed to assist land use planning activities in the coastal bays watershed.
- Assess shoreline erosion rates to help with long term coastal hazard planning.

Significant Accomplishments and Priorities...

Maryland Coastal Bays Aquatic Sensitive Areas Initiative

Since 1999, the Maryland Coastal Program has led the development of a Coastal Bays Aquatic Sensitive Areas Management and Education Plan.

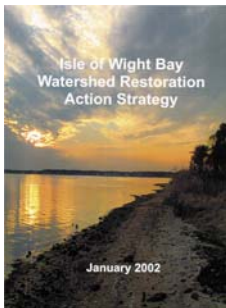
Recognizing the relationship between water-use activities and estuarine resources, the initiative involves: (1) identification of sensitive aquatic resources, (2) evaluation of the risks from water-use activities, and (3) development of appropriate management and education tools. A technical task force developed a series of aquatic resource maps for the coastal bays, which were used to identify aquatic sensitive areas having multiple sensitive resources of high value. The management team has used the information from the technical task force, along with feedback from stakeholders and review of current policies, to develop a management and education plan. A series of resource-based conflicts have been identified as priorities, and recommendations to alleviate these conflicts are being refined. Key conflicts include: (1) boating in shallow water environments; (2) building of docks and piers through wetlands; (3) commercial and recreational fishing conflicts; and (4) awareness and preservation of sensitive areas locations. The Coastal Bays Policy Committee is scheduled to review the final recommendations for approval in the Summer/Fall of 2004.



Sample Sensitive Area Maps

Atlantic Coastal Bays Protection Act

Activities on the land immediately surrounding coastal waters have a great impact on the coastal bays water quality and wildlife habitat. In 2002, the Maryland Coastal Program and its partners provided essential information and support during the development and passing of the *Atlantic Coastal Bays Protection Act*. The Act defined critical areas in the coastal bays as “all lands within 1000 feet of the tidal waters’ edge, or from the landward edge of adjacent tidal waters, and the lands under them.” The Act mandated that local governments put a program in place to protect these critical areas. Included in the new programs is a requirement for a 100-foot buffer of natural vegetation to be established landward from the mean high water line of tidal waters and tributary streams. As a result of this legislation, water quality, and plant, fish, and wildlife habitat have increased protection in the coastal bays.



Watershed Planning

Since 2000, the Coastal Program has worked with other stakeholders in Worcester County to develop and implement watershed plans in 4 of the 5 subwatersheds of the coastal bays. The five coastal bays are considered by the State to be in need of restoration and protection. In partnership with the Coastal Program, DNR’s Watershed Restoration Action Strategies (WRAS) Program has provided planning support, technical assistance, and funding to Worcester County to complete these watershed plans. The WRAS Program is designed to develop priority water quality and habitat preservation and restoration plans within a comprehensive watershed context.



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